

Rockport Harbor Advisory Committee
Special Meeting
January 13, 2015 at 10 AM in the Board of Selectmen Meeting Room

Present: Chairman Montello, Fred Hillier, Chris Murch, Kevin Carrigan, Larry Stepenuck, Phil Crotty, Steve Fritch; also Harbormasters Scott Story and Rosemary Lesch

Absent: Dana Jorgensson.

A quorum was present. The attendees were asked to sign in.

Purpose of Special Meeting: The purpose of the special meeting was to discuss a two page questionnaire presented to the Town by the Army Corps of Engineers regarding a Granite Pier Extension feasibility study.

DPW Deputy Director Tim Olson opened the meeting and turned it over to Phil Crotty. Crotty re-stated the purpose of the meeting and provided background concerning the GPE feasibility study project, and the funding for a consultant to assist the town.

Then Crotty turned the meeting over to Consultant Dave Smith from GZA. Smith explained that he and Tim Olson had negotiated a contract to answer the USACE questionnaire. Smith had received and reviewed a lot of information from Crotty before today's meeting.

Dave Smith indicated that the current Rockport project is further ahead than most projects he has worked on. Going forward he will develop responses, provide an updated cost estimate based on the 1965 USACE study of Granite Pier using current costs from the ongoing Rockport project at Bearskin Neck. He has worked with the Corps on many projects, but most are not new projects. The Corps emphasizes community needs. The support of government officials is critical.

Chairman Montello opened the meeting for questioning. First to speak was Steve Ouellette who is a local attorney specializing in maritime law. Mr. Ouellette said it is important for the Rockport response to focus on what needs to be done in the future, and not just what is being done now. The focus should be on commercial use of the harbor, but also be mindful of the Town's mooring list (which now contains more than four-hundred names.)

Larry Stepenuck then asked about the storage at Granite Pier. Will that go away? Will others come from far way and push out the local people. He wants to see a fuel facility and bait storage and spoke of unintended consequences. He also asked if the GP extension will cause more erosion at Back Beach.

Steve Fritch, who owns a seal-watching business in Rockport, then said the focus needs to be on all commercial boating and not just fishing.

Bill Lee, who operates a commercial vessel and a maritime surveying business, said that other individuals from elsewhere have a right to come to Rockport, and that Rockport vessels often visit other ports, and some go back and forth between harbors.

Bob Smith said that he used to operate a large commercial sailing vessel out of Rockport Harbor, and such activity could return, and he supports the GP study project.

Rollyn Hoffman from the Granite Pier Committee then said he can provide a list of the boats that currently use Granite Pier.

Fred Hillier spoke and said he has fished off Rockport for forty years. The best place to find lobsters is Ipswich Bay. He supports the project, especially additional moorings for commercial fishermen.

Chris Murch is a recreational boater and inquired how many fishermen are on the mooring list.

Harbormaster Story added that the lack of a fuel facility in Rockport presents many problems, including safety and environmental.

Bill Lee added that Salem State College has just received the necessary permit from NOAA for a mussel farm operation off Rockport. That mussel farm operation, which has long been in the study and testing stage as a research project, will operate out of Granite Pier.

John Thompson, who is a key figure with the Schooner Adventure out of Gloucester, said there could be expanded use of Thacher Island if the GPE proposal moves forward. He fully supports it..

Bill Lee said that there is no problem with eel grass, as explained in a letter prepared by Allan Michaels, PhD, and submitted.

Harbormaster Story added that the Massachusetts Seacoast Bond Council is interested in the project.

Mr. Story also stated that there is a potential for charter vessels to operate out of Granite Pier, if extended to create an enlarged harbor.

An attendee suggested contacting Paul St. Germain of the Thacher Island organization for his views. (This has been done and hopefully a letter will be forthcoming.)

Bob Visnick added that there will be a positive economic impact for Rockport, if there are additional facilities for visiting boats.

Larry Stepenuck pointed out that there will not be enough parking. Bob Smith countered that the parking argument was used with the Shalin Liu project, but theater-goers find a place to park. Also Steve Ouellette pointed out that the traffic pattern will be restructured, since there will be fewer trailers parked on the pier if the boats are at a mooring.

Bill Lee said there will be enhanced opportunities for bird-watching, and recreational fishing from the extended pier.

Phil Crotty said there might be some money available if an application is made to the Rockport CPC committee.

Rob Hoffman said that if a staircase is built at the end of the pier, that should alleviate parking problems.

Mike Anderson agreed with Larry Stepenuck that the trap storage could be interfered with and that is a problem.

Harbormaster Lesch mentioned that the Junior Olympics take place at Granite Pier now and that should be a factor.

Harbormaster Story, in answer to a question about floats instead of moorings, said floats will come in when the harbor is safe for floats. He supports the proposal.

Someone pointed out that the Rockport municipal water reservoir and the main sewer line to Pigeon Cove are in danger from rising ocean water, and the GP extension will take care of that.

Chairman Montello thanked everybody for attending and contributing. Several letters of support were received. Meeting adjourned at 11:30AM.

Following the meeting, HAC Member Mr. Larry Stepenuck submitted the following statements which are incorporated into the minutes:

Submission 1:

Items for input to The Rockport Harbor Advisory Meeting held February, 25, 2014
From HAC member, Lawrence P. Stepenuck

Edits/corrections to the draft HAC "Special Meeting", minutes a meeting held at 10:30 AM
in the Rockport Town Hall on January 13, 2015

I believe that the minutes should be amended to more accurately reflect what was said and in what context. I also believe there is an omission from the draft minutes that should be included. The omission was the verbal exchange between a marine tradesperson and a member of the HAC relative to a document presentation, and (verbal announcement), by the marine tradesperson as evidence of the Rockport Lobstermen's Assoc membership official and unified support for the Granite Pier proposal. With the responsibility we all have as public officers reviewing and in some times preparing public input documentation, our minutes and public interactions should be as accurate as possible. I am requesting we put our "acceptance" of minutes from the January 13 "special HAC meeting" on hold until our next meeting.

Submission 2:

To: Rockport Harbor Advisory Committee, (HAC)

From: Lawrence P. Stepenuck, (HAC member and commercial lobstermen/fisherman)

Subject: Suggested edits and inclusions to/for the January 13 "Special" HAC Meeting draft minutes

There was one significant omission and a few areas of incomplete documentation from the draft minutes that I believe should be included in any final version. The omission that I refer to is the presentation, (verbal & written document), by Bill Lee that explicitly stated that the Rockport Lobstermen's Association was in favor of the extension project and the letter he presented was evidence of this group's approval. Also omitted from the minutes was my voiced objection to such an assumption and verbal presentation. My stated reasons were; 1) there has not been a meeting of the Rockport Lobstermen's Association in years, 2) no one person has the right to speak for the group, 3) many of the members of the group are not in favor of an expansion project if it would mean any loss of existing storage/work space or parking, and 4) many existing commercial lobstermen would not support the opening-up of new mooring space for out of town lobster boats. The last item reflects the reality that there are gear conflicts already existing in near-by coastal waters and the pressure from boats moving north from "closed areas" to our southward would cause added pressure for storage space, parking, and on-water confrontations.

At least on two occasions during the "special" meeting there was reference to the notion that any project feasibility should take into consideration what could be lost not just what would be added by a project such as this. Besides myself, I believe Mr. Mike Anderson, (commercial lobsterman), also mentioned this element.

In the paragraph quoting me on the first page of the "draft" minutes also leaves out my request to have some "modeling" done for any extension proposal to ascertain possible effects of construction upon Back and Front beaches. My request was not for the modeling to be done at this time, (the budget for the feasibility study will not support), but to include the need for and getting an estimate for such work.

I also believe that the "draft" minutes should be even handed in how they represent person's comments and the individuals themselves. If we are to include titles, interests, affiliations, or means of making a living for some, (I am assuming it was done for effect), we should include the same for all presenters. I further request that if minutes are to list comments in a context such as used in the 5th to last paragraph on page two of the "draft" minutes; "Larry Stepenuck pointed out....., Bob Smith countered...", that we do the same throughout the minutes, not just in one area. I believe there was a comment related to the issue of parking conflicts discussed in this portion of the "special" meeting that was not included in the minutes. When it was implied, (Steve Ouellette), that parking would not be a problem because there are no problems with parking associated with events at the Shalin Liu, I believe a couple of folks expressed disagreement that was not noted.

It should also be noted that when there were parking restrictions placed on existing public spaces on T-Wharf and one time on Granite Pier, (Junior Olympics), there were negative effects upon existing functions.

